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ABSTRACT

This research project explored how children's ability to exchange ideas and resolve conflict was influenced by regularly setting aside time to dictate and act out stories. Research methods for this 3-month project included audiotapes, a questionnaire, and the stories from 23 first-grade children. Observations looked specifically at conflict resolution, roles and interactions among storytellers, and the sense of community manifested in play. Observations indicated that the children became more autonomous in exchanging ideas and listening to one another's potential solutions, as the children encountered issues that arose in the natural context of acting out their stories. As the children devised a workable structure for storytelling, they began to assume greater ownership as the process became more familiar, directing their comments and questions to one another. As they acted in one another's stories, each child's view of the world was assimilated by his or her peers. Children's story plays formed a distinctive and colorful quilt of reoccurring patterns that merged into new designs as the children shared their attempts to make sense of their world. (WP)

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Once Upon a Classroom

Kathy Obersinner

December 1994

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ABSTRACT

In the course of this research project I explored how the children's ability to exchange ideas and resolve conflict was influenced by regularly setting aside time for them to dictate and act out stories. As the children encountered issues that arose in the natural context of acting out their stories, I observed them become more autonomous in exchanging ideas and listening to one another's potential solutions. While the children devised a workable structure for storytelling, they began to assume greater ownership as the process became more familiar, directing their comments and questions to one another rather than to myself. As they acted in one another's stories, each child's view of the world was assimilated by her peers. Particular characters seemed to become community property, with the children developing shared mythological-like archetypes relevant to their lives. Their story plays formed a distinctive and colorful patchwork quilt of reoccurring patterns that merged into new designs as the children shared their attempts to make sense of their world.

ONCE UPON A CLASSROOM

The questions and concerns that have filled my head lately have predominately been concerned with how to center the curriculum around issues and projects that the children find worthwhile, that come from them. Vivan Gussin Paley was my primary inspiration for this project. After attending her keynote speech and workshops at the 1994 NAEYC conference, I began to consider the tremendous potential of using the children's own stories (a large component of Paley's kindergarten curriculum) as a sociomoral and intellectual learning experience in the classroom. Paley caused me to rethink my priorities of the role of teacher, to wonder how dictating and acting out their own stories influences the children's ability to problem solve, resolve conflict, and exchange ideas. Upon further exploration, other questions arose:

* How do children resolve conflicts that arise as they dictate and act out their stories?
* How are the children influenced by one another's topics?
* How do they choose characters and interact with one another?
* Does this process seem to enhance the sense of community in the classroom?

Paley's keen observations of the social interactions among the children in her class and their attempts to make meaning of their world demonstrate the importance she places on social and moral development. Getting to know one another, we develop the logical and emotional foundations for all other studies. Rather than letting the children's talk flow over her, Paley takes the time to attempt to understand what they are expressing, how the context of their role playing and drama helps them to cope with the real world around them. Children learn that everything is supposed to make sense, and if it doesn't, ask why and do it again (Paley, 1990). This need to create order and make sense of their world offers an optimal environment for learning. Instead of creating teacher-directed sociomoral "lessons", the conflicts and issues that arise from the children's natural interactions during the day, including those that occur as the children act out their own stories, can be used to facilitate and model conflict resolution, how to exchange points of view, and to decenter. In The Moral Child: Nurturing Children's Moral Growth (1988), William Damon discusses how by simple virtue of participating in social relationships, children encounter the classic moral issue of humanity; fairness, honesty, responsibility, and kindness. Moral awareness comes from within a child's normal social experience - it doesn't need to be imposed from outside.

It is important, as well as interesting to note that in the process of making sense of the world, a view of what is fair and honorable to adults may not be shared by children. William Damon (1988) points out how the adult versions of moral norms often do not make sense to young children; they are only able to comprehend adult versions when they discover them in their own social play. Damon

claims that interactions with peers promote moral growth in a child, whereas when a child and adult interact, the child's actions and reactions are ultimately governed by the adult's directives. When acting out stories, I have attempted to set up an environment that encourages the children to take the lead when conflicts or issues arise in order that they may exchange points of view - and experience resolution as a result of discussion. When the children form the social rules and structures around their story acting, they have a stake in them. Damon states that this gives a child a view of the rules from within - from the perspective of one who makes, changes, and enforces rules, as well as the one who is simply expected to follow them (1988). Dialoguing with others about social and moral issues helps children become aware of these issues themselves, as well as how others think about them (Edwards, 1986). They learn how to agree and disagree respectfully with others and how to clarify their thinking. Edwards discusses the importance of listening carefully to children and giving them plenty of time for reflection.

As part of my research, I am interested in where children get their ideas for their stories; how much they draw from stories they have heard and read. Storytelling is one of our oldest forms of communication, not belonging to any one civilization, continent, or race (Roney, 1989). It has been a major means of passing on cultural values and history, and contains great potential in the classroom today for these traditional purposes. Jane Yolen asserts that the listening to and learning of the old tales should be among the most basic elements of our education. These elements enable us to understand our own and other cultures, and state the symbolic and abstract truths of our common human existence. In addition, Yolen emphasizes that the role of myth is to help a child understanding his or her own existence (1981). Storytelling assists children in developing imagination and the ability to think creatively and predictively. The abstract quality of written language is the primary stumbling block for young children. Those who are regularly exposed to storytelling are provided with opportunities to practice replacing words by images of words, which is the heart of writing (Roney, 1989). Through story, the interactions between people are revealed, providing examples of social contexts in which children can connect real-life relationships between themselves and others being acted out. This acting out provides children with a range of options to consider when it comes to understanding their own motives and actions, as well as those of friends and others in their lives (Mallan, 1992).

Paley recounts how the children's story-play is naturally limited by their inexperience and lack of skills. Exposure to a wide variety of literature introduces new vocabulary, language patterns, plots, and characters, extending children's thinking and reasoning which is revealed in their stories (1981). Children need to be encouraged to tell their own stories and interpret traditional literature so that it can be related to their own lives. When they personalize the information, it forms a connection between what they already know and what is new (Hoyt, 1992).

Every person has the potential to tell a story. Storytelling reinforces the child's own storytelling skills, that fundamental grammar of all thought and communication, which enables each human being to order his or her experiences so they can be transmitted to others (Barton, 1986). In Many Ways of Knowing: Using Drama, Oral Interactions, and the Visual Arts to Enhance Reading Comprehension (1992), Linda Hoyt points out how children who have the opportunity to translate what they have read (or heard read) into drama, oral interactions, or visual arts can more easily generate new meanings and expand existing ones. As they act out stories, children need to consider various issues that arise and come to some sort of agreement as a group. Hoyt referred to the fact that transmediation is especially successful with learning disabled students and ESL learners; the multisensory approach allowing special learners to verify their information through several communication systems.

As children make up stories and dictate them to the teacher, they need to work though any inconsistencies in order to act them out (Paley, 1981). When taking dictation, and a child's story doesn't make sense, the storyteller needs to consider how to make it work. The children are constantly challenged by grammar, syntax, and meaning, as well as working through social and moral issues that arise.

Lucy Calkins, in her wonderful book Living Between the Lines (1991) relates how every family has stories that are told over and over, stories that are a part of their family heritage. When children create stories they are sharing a rich part of themselves with their classmates, including their langauge, images, and sense of the world. Through this sharing, connections are made, empathy is formed. Often one story will influence other children's stories, as they link what they act out and hear with their own lives. This thread becomes interwoven to build a strong sense of commonality. Children begin to see how others have similar and different experiences, which can help them to accept diversity (1991). Linda Sheppard relates how living with story nurtures a classroom environment that features collaboration as a way of life (1990). When children act out stories, they become involved in the experiences of the storyteller, sharing in that child's life and perceptions. A sense of community and group history are built as they share their stories, not only through acting them out, but through participating as the audience.

I am also interested in how acting out stories affects self esteem. When children tell stories, they become aware of the power of their words. An important byproduct of storytelling is a new level of confidence and self-esteem for the teller (Mallan, 1992). In Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance and Social Interaction (1991), Kemple cites research that has shown that academic success is related to how accepted a child feels by his or her peers. Teachers are becoming more aware of the importance of modeling and facilitating successful social interaction among students. The author relates factors that influence peer acceptance, and clearly

outlines strategies for helping a child who is having difficulties socially. By acting out their own stories, a child is placed in an environment that offers them the opportunity to be in charge, to be empowered. They can observe and participate in exchanging points of view and conflict resolution, which will hopefully result in their learning more positive ways of interacting with their peers.

I am drawn to the children's telling of their stories by the connections that tie their lives together as they share who they are and what is important to them. Working out issues in the form of make-believe is very fundamental, offering a valid reason to resolve conflicts and attempt to get along with peers.

THE PROCESS

> "ONCE UPON A TIME there was a puffin and a turtle. And the turtle went swimming. And the puffin sat on the iceberg waiting for the turtle...."

Upon the conclusion of this first story play, there was a mass rush towards the sign up sheet I had put out. And from that moment on, the classroom swirled with the characters of turtle and puffin, princesses and unicorns, as the twenty three first graders began to expand their perception of who they were to include storytellers and actors. We set aside time for acting out story plays three days a week, generally in the half hour right before lunch. The children would approach me to write down their stories during literacy centers, signing their names on a waiting list due to the sizable interest. Some children asked to write stories nearly every day (one child wrote his name seven times on our sign up sheet that went from 1-20!) while others were content to do so occasionally. Only two children didn't write any story plays, though everyone participated in acting over and again. During story plays, the storyteller would stand in front of her assembled classmates and choose actors, I would read her story, and the children would spontaneously act it out. Often issues would arise that needed to be discussed and resolved before continuing. As I reflected upon the process of the children acting out their own stories, I began to see patterns emerge under the following themes:

* How do children resolve conflicts that arise as they dictate and act out their stories?
* How are the children influenced by one another's topics?
* How do they choose characters and interact with one another?
* Does this process seem to enhance the sense of community in the classroom?

I gathered data for my three month long project through observing the children as they dictated and acted out stories, from audio taping their interactions as they acted, from a questionnaire I gave them two months into the project, and from the stories themselves.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As David was dictating his story, Taylor asked if he would add an aggressive polar bear. David agreed that there could be a bear, but that they were all friends....

Such a variety of issues surfaced as the children and I ventured into the process of acting out story plays. The children needed to figure out such things as how to choose actors so everyone had a turn and how many actors should be in a play at once. It became apparent from the start that the children felt the storyteller should have the final say in most issues. As a child commented on the questionnaire: "The storyteller should be able to say how

people act in her story because she knows what she wants it to look like."

Many of the actors and audience joined in singing Abiyoyo with Morgen while acting out her story. As she held up her hand and said, "That's enough," all but one child immediately stopped singing. Darren quietly admonished, "She said to stop now", and the child did.

In order for the children to be able to understand the logic of exchanging ideas to resolve a conflict, as well as to evaluate how workable their ideas were, it was important for them to experience the consequences of their decisions with as little adult intervention as possible. Whatever solution the group decided on, we would try. During the first few story sessions the children asked friends beforehand to be in the their plays, but it soon became apparent that this method didn't ensure that everyone got a turn. As children began complaining, "Not fair, I haven't gotten a turn..." I asked the group what they thought would be a fair way to choose actors.

T: You could get a piece of paper and see whose playing it, and pick, um, say I'd like to have Jon to play...then write his name.
Me: Write the actors names on your story?
T: Yeah.
Me: But what if someone doesn't get a turn?
W: If that happens and they choose me, and I already had some turns, I would just not do it.
D: She could pick all the people if she had enough (roles).
H: If they really wanted a turn, then you didn't give them a turn and then they would get one the next time after.
Me: So if they didn't get a turn, then the storyteller might...
H: They have to choose them.
Me: They <u>have</u> to have a turn, or can that storyteller choose?
H: If they're not in that story, then they get to be in the 2nd or 3rd or 1st one.
S: Maybe we could teach some other adults how to do stories....then they could probably do it without you telling them, then all the kids could probably get a turn faster. D: The storyteller should choose his actors.
S. If someone has already gotten some turns, then some one else should get a turn.
Me: How many turns would be fair?
C: Two turns.

So we voted and nearly everyone agreed that two turns should be the limit. Naturally, we soon reached the point where everyone had had two turns, so then we needed to consider what to do next. After much discussion, the children decided to choose actors by tables, going from youngest to oldest. This solution obviously required extra time and energy since we had to discuss when birthdays were, and some children weren't sure of theirs. However, they stuck with this method for several weeks before the same child who had proposed it, suggested having the storyteller choose! The

class agreed to try it for one day, and I noticed that out of the twenty two children in the class, fifteen had at least one turn, with six children having two turns, and one child having three turns, demonstrating the children's concern for fairness. The next day, they voted on letting the storyteller always choose, and decided to implement Janie's idea of using a chart to keep track. It was interesting to note that though Janie had proposed using a chart previously, somehow her suggestion wasn't initially accepted, perhaps because the other children didn't understand what she meant, or didn't see its value. It wasn't until we had acted out stories for nearly 2 months that they finally voted to use her proposal. Though I was often tempted to suggest this solution, I held back, feeling it was important that the children arrived at a consensus on their own, after evaluating a variety of attempts.

Occasionally a conflict resolution would take up to twenty minutes, and though some children would express impatience to get on with the story plays, they seemed to value being in charge of the process. I feel this sense of ownership naturally evolved as a result of acting out stories they had conceived.

> *As we prepared to act out Gary's play, he showed the children the map he had drawn of the action in his story. Taking the script from my hand, he began choosing his actors, describing what would happen to particular character: "The fish gets eaten", and offering suggestions for how actors should perform: "The volcano erupts like this" ...*

Conflicts occasionally arose over not wanting a particular child as an actor, and sometimes resolutions didn't take the path I thought they would. At one point David was choosing actors by tables, but when he got to Darren he told me, "I just can't choose him, he's too mean to me." I empathized, but suggested that he ask Darren if he could cooperate, and if Darren agreed, could he be in it?" I called Darren over, telling him David's concern, hoping he would agree to get along, but he responded, "No, I just won't be in his story and he won't be in mine." Both boys were satisfied and we left it at that.

Initially, most plays had three to six characters, but the number increased until at one point a child had twenty three! Rather than assume that the children would automatically understand the need to limit the number of actors, I decided they should experience it first hand. As all of the children tried to act out a lively plot in the small classroom, the noise and confusion were apparent, so we stopped the play and discussed how it was going. Most agreed that it was too crowded and loud, so we negotiated a more appropriate number. After experiencing so many actors in such a small space, the children could see the need for the limitation. Later, when this decision was challenged, the group reminded one another that more than ten was too "wild".

At times the noise and energy level seemed too high, though the children didn't seem disturbed. Expressing my concern that the

audience couldn't hear the story, I asked what they thought actors should do when as they join a play. The children made several suggestions which I have since used, but upon later reflection, I realized that this really was my problem, and it may have been more appropriate to ask them if they felt there needed to be a change. Having the children take ownership of the problem would have perhaps helped them become more aware of how their actions impact others. It has been a challenge to phrase questions in a way that generates ideas, rather than leads the children down a path reflecting my personal limits. And though my limits are valid, I need to recognize them as my own limits, and not necessarily those of the children. At times I unintentionally structured a question so that a particular type of response was prompted. Asking what we should do if an actor was talking when he shouldn't be, the suggestions I received from the children included:

> *"If someone is bad they can't be in the play. The story stops and they have to leave."*
> *"They should put their heads down on the table."*
> *"They should go out in the hall."*
> *"They need to be respectful listeners."*

While these responses may have reflected the moral development of the children, phrasing my question in a more positive, open ended way may have generated more constructive responses: "what behaviors are acceptable for an actor, and which could interfere or hurt others?" During a story play when the ogre captured a princess, I was offered ample practice at defining if the noise and action were appropriate for the scene being acted out. Viewed from this perspective, I found it clearer to decide if the noise was part of the drama or if it would be appropriate to interject "the ogre carefully caught the princess". We also role played ways to act out parts beforehand, in order to discuss what is dramatic acting and what is unsafe.

Originally I was interested in the kinds of issues that arose during story plays, but didn't distinguish between the children's concerns and mine. Gradually I began to focus on the importance of the children being the initiators. I attempted to change my role to one of supporting their exchange of ideas, of providing the concrete experiences necessary at this stage of sociomoral development for perspective taking.

ROLES AND INTERACTIONS AMONG STORYTELLERS

The King called the giraffe on the phone and asked, "Can you come to my birthday?" The giraffe said, "Yes, I can , but a little bit later." The King said, "That's okay." Then the King went to the elephant's and asked, "Can you come to my party?" "Yes", said the elephant, "But I've got to bring my baby with me or he'll get lost." "That's okay", said the king.

The children's stories often reflected their view of social

interactions, as well as subjects that were important to them. Some children repeatedly included particular characters and soon came to be perceived as these characters in the eyes of their classmates. Jake liked turtles, writing stories about them not only during story plays, but throughout the day. When other children began to include turtles in their stories, he was often chosen for the role, but if he wasn't, he would display his ownership by commenting "oh no" and covering his face up, or counseling how turtles should act, which was often accepted. Sometimes children would include particular characters in order to have specific people in their story play, such as Morgen did when writing a story with puffin and turtle in it "so Jake and David could be in it". And though Taylor never wrote a story of his own, he assumed the role of the cougar in many stories and was very interested in what other's wrote, as well as acting in them. He asked Morgen to put a cougar in her story so he could be in it. After they acted it out, Carly changed the lion in her story to a cougar, asking Taylor if he would be the actor.

Choosing actors was the most challenging part of story plays. Some children found it difficult to choose within the guidelines they had established in order for everyone to have a turn. Because of this, the choosing process could become long, and though this part was important to the storyteller, for those waiting it could become tedious.

> *Darren had specific ideas about who he wanted in his play, but the actors he had in mind had already had a turn. As he announced his characters he ordered, "Girls don't put up your hands." He reluctantly chose several children, refusing to choose a child he labeled a "twerp". At another point he complained, "There's no one to pick, though four boys and several girls had their hands raised. He sat down and refused to choose anyone until I pointed out that he wouldn't be able to act out his story if he didn't have actors. I found it interesting to note that despite his negative attitude, the children still raised their hands and wanted to be in his play. As they began, Darren himself seem to forget his reluctance to choose. He became caught up in the plot, directing actors and smiling broadly as the audience clapped.*

I was very moved by the empathy the children could demonstrate for their classmates. A child who was not often chosen to be in plays because of his difficult personality complained, "Pick me, pick me, she won't pick me" when it was Sara's turn, and she walked over to him smiling, hands outstretched, and asked him to be the ogre. He smiled back and accepted. Another time, when Nicholas complained no one would choose him, Morgen told him, "I'll choose you for my play, Nicholas." And Darren, who often lost control when he didn't get a turn, offered Morgen a flower when she cried because there wasn't time to act out her story that day.

Several times children would attempt to collaborate on a story, but often without much success. Two boys began writing a story

together but after a few sentences, they couldn't agree on how to proceed. Carl argued that a polar bear couldn't fit down a rabbit hole, but David pushed for writing it that way anyway. Though they discussed it amicably for some time, they were never able to resolve their different approaches of reality vs. make believe, so each boy wrote his own story. Occasionally two children would finish a story together, but I noticed that generally one child was more outspoken, persuading the other.

D: What color do you want the turtle soccer team to be?
J: How about green?
D: No, let's have yellow.
J: I like green, like turtles...
D: But yellow is....
J: Okay.

As we continued to act out story plays the variety and complexity of interactions among the children became apparent. At times peer pressure would be exerted so that a child would conform to the group's decisions:

When David advised Gary not to choose Bob because he got too wild, Bob looked at him soberly and stood still.

Morgen asked who wanted to be a cat in her play. Carol, who tended to get out of control, said she did. Morgen told her she needed to raise her hand, then after Carol complied, Morgen asked her if she would be wild, "because we don't have wild kitties." Carol agreed, so Morgen picked her. A little later, when Carol became too active, Morgen reminded her that she had agreed to not be wild, and Carol quieted down.

It was interesting to observe the footnotes the children began adding about their characters as time went on:

Caitlyn needed a prince, "But you got to get married." Soon after this, Morgen needed a prince in her story. She added, "But this is one where you don't get married!" Carly instructed: "There is a girl tiger and a tiger prince, but they don't kiss, they only touch noses!"

Each time the audience would react by either raising their hands, or putting them down if they didn't like what the role required. They soon began asking questions to clarify, such as "Does the fish die?". Whatever the storyteller decreed was their prerogative, with the others playing along, secure in the understanding that when it was their turn, they could also do as they chose. Characters didn't have to be alive - Gary had a child act as a volcano in his story, demonstrating how to erupt. Darren had a sun, which he instructed how to rise and set. At other times the storyteller might have a role without an actor, informing the group, "We'll just pretend they are there."

Though the roles and interactions among the children were often

perplexing to adults, the children seemed to share a common perspective, an unspoken understanding towards issues of fairness, being left out, and taking on the nature of make believe characters.

TOPIC INFLUENCE

"What actors do you want in your story, Gary?" "Well, a turtle, a puffin, and a cougar .... like Jake and David write about."

About two months into the project, I interviewed the children on where they got their ideas for stories and what they liked to tell stories about. They reported that they got their ideas "from my head", from television, books, and friends. Their topics included the fanciful: princes and princesses, unicorns, ballerinas and television characters, such as power rangers. But animals predominated - animals that generally did human things. Most interesting was the extent to which the class was influenced by one another's characters and topics. After the first turtle/puffin story, turtles and puffins slowly began to appear in nearly every child's story in one context or another. These two characters became community property, weaving a connection between the children, perhaps symbolic of friendship and loyalty.

> *"The turtle and puffin looked out and saw a pirate ship. They started to fire cannons until the puffin said, "Get on my back and I'll ride you hone, but get in your shell because it's going to be a fast ride..."*

The original authors didn't seem to mind that others used their ideas; perhaps they didn't consider them "theirs". Once an idea had been introduced, it often came up in another child's story in slightly altered form. Turtles and puffins playing soccer, princesses being captured by ogres, and animals finding buried treasure in holes became community fantasies. The children seemed to develop their own mythological archetypes, relevant to their lives.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Mouse had a birthday. All of his friends were there. They went to the lake to have their party. Horse said, "I'll take you for a ride in my wagon"...

The regularity, as well as the sharing nature of story plays strengthened the sense of community in the classroom. As the children began to see themselves as storytellers and actors, and participated in one another's stories, they came to know each other a little better, sharing their language, images, and sense of the world. Upon observing the children acting out stories, a preservice teacher commented on the strength of the sense of community, conveyed as the children shared ideas and concerns, and

reacted to one another's stories:

> *Grant's story depicted four children in a tent, telling one another riddles. As I read his description, the actors spontaneously began to share their own, despite the fact that Grant had written riddles in the script. I asked him if this was okay, and he said yes, smiling, then told me to read his when they were done. The audience came together in laughter, united by a 1st grade appreciation for knock-knock jokes.*

A demonstration of their support for one another occurred when Ivan, who generally kept himself separate from the classroom community and avoided reading and writing, suddenly decided in the midst of watching a child's story play that he wanted to write one. He proceeded to dictate a very short tale to an adult in the room, asking me several times when we could act it out. The children had been sitting for a long while, but when we asked them if they thought they could sit long enough to hear Ivan's first story, they all said yes. Though Ivan didn't play a role, he choose actors, smiling proudly as his classmates became part of his first attempt, which incidently, included a turtle. Later he informed me that he wouldn't "pass" anymore when asked to be in a play, becoming an active participant in storytelling!

The sense of community in the classroom supported the children in their ability to empathize and take on the perspective of others. It allowed Angie, who had been waiting with anticipation to act out her first story, to let Jesse have act out his story before her since he was moving in two days. It motivated the other children to offer Jesse another turn to act despite the fact that he had had more turns than anyone else. By sharing their different views of the world through story plays, the children's ability to see a situation through someone else's eyes was deepened.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As the children and I grew more comfortable with the story telling process, they began verbalizing their thoughts and concerns, assuming greater ownership and autonomy, while I became more aware of the importance of asking open-ended questions and encouraging the discussion to flow between the children. Though they still seem to view me as part of the storytelling process, I see the time coming when they independently act out their stories. Even now, some of the children have shown signs of this autonomy by asking to act out plays during choice time, and going around and signing up actors. This has become a classroom of actors and storytellers - which perhaps all classes would be if given the opportunity. I see the storytelling process becoming more and more refined as the children devised a workable structure for storytelling, negotiating through various suggestions for how to pick actors, how to keep track of turns, and other related issues. Their stories have formed a distinctive and colorful patchwork quilt, with reoccurring patterns that merge into new designs as the children act out and

observe their peer's story plays, choosing elements to call their own.

The emphasis in teaching so often focuses on content rather than on how to set up the environment to assist children in becoming autonomous learners. In the rush to cover the curriculum, the importance of exchanging ideas and the need for children to make sense of their world in their own way is often overlooked. As the children dictated their own stories and I wrote them down, they began constructing knowledge about how authors write, made connections between written symbols and oral language, and considered issues about genre, syntax, and grammar. As they acted their stories out, they dealt with issues that arose in the natural context of their stories, problems that needed to be worked out in order to continue. Writing stories allowed the children to explore ideas and concern that were relevant to their lives. Though their topics may seem to have dealt with themes of fantasy, the children were attempting to make sense of their world through the use of symbols, and sharing a part of themselves with their classmates. They began to see how others' lives are similar and different. This research project has shown me the value of using the children's materials for teaching, as well as the importance of stories and storytelling in all of our lives.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

One day the ogre kidnapped the princess. He brought her to the castle, but the princess had all the keys. She took the right one and put it in the slot and turned it. And she opened the door.....

What is the role of violence in story plays, and should the teacher intervene?

How do the children's community symbols reflect their view of the world?

Does dictating and acting out story plays enhance children's ability to write creatively, as they become more familiar with the rich language and patterns of books?

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